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AUTHOR Hertzberg, Edwina L.
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ABSTRACT

Although homelessness is not a new phenomenon, the number of homeless people today has fostered mobilization on their behalf by public and private sectors. Principal factors accepted as contributing to homelessness are inadequate low-cost housing, unemployment, chemical dependency, family violence, and inadequate community services for the mentally ill. This study, based on symbolic interaction, examined homeless persons' perspectives of what factors contributed to their homelessness, what life on the street was like for them, and what would help to stabilize their lives. Participant observations and in-depth interviews with 37 homeless people were conducted over 9 months at two drop-in centers serving the homeless. Results revealed a downward spiral of homelessness and survival, and a continuum and typology of homelessness consisting of three groups: (1) Resistors who were determined to get off the street; (2) Teeterers who transmitted a sense of helplessness, depression, and vulnerability; and (3) Accommodators who expressed enjoyment of the homeless life. Group membership appeared dependent on length of time being homeless, attitude toward homelessness, location where staying, reasons for homelessness, literacy, desire for more education, family dysfunction, desire for one's own place, and a realistic hope for the future. Social workers must actively address the causative factors of housing, indadequate services, unemployment, and inadequate income. (Author/NB)

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ABSTRACT

HOMELESSNESS: FROM THE CLIENTS' PERSPECTIVES

by

Edwina L. Hertzberg, ACSW, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Social Work
Augsburg College
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Although homelessness is not a new phenomenon, the recent perceived increase in numbers of people experiencing homelessness has fostered mobilization on their behalf by public and private sectors.

The principal factors accepted as contributing to homelessness are:

- severe reduction in low-cost housing stock
- unemployment
- chemical dependency
- family violence
- shortage of community services for the mentally ill.

Only the categories of homeless persons are known. Little is known as to how they perceive their situations or what they believe would help to stabilize their lives.

Because taking the client where s/he is and client self-determination are social work values, this research attempted to understand the clients' perspectives. Symbolic Interactionism was its theoretical base.

Questions addressed were:

1. What factors contributed to respondents becoming homeless
2. What was life on the streets like for them
3. What would help to stabilize their lives.

Participant observation and in-depth interviews were supported by a literature search and interviews with key informants.

From the data emerged a downward spiral of survival, a continuum and typology of homelessness. Implications for social work practice include short and long-term interventions, direct and macro practice. Social Workers must actively address the causative factors of housing, inadequate services, unemployment and inadequate income.

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HOMELESSNESS: FROM THE CLIENTS' PERSPECTIVES

by

Edwina L. Hertzberg, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Augsburg College
Department of Social Work

The Problem

Homelessness is not a new phenomenon. Records of wanders and beggars are referenced in the Bible. The English Poor Laws were developed, in part, in response to the phenomemon and needs of homeless people (Trattner, 1979:10). The settling of the United States, and the expansion to the West is replete with people on the move to seek a new life, or in the case of miners, lumbermen and railroad roustabouts, moving to where the need was to develop the frontier (Rooney, 1970: 21-22). The Great Depression was marked by widespread unemployment and people wandering in search of jobs and homes (Trattner, 1979: 223).

In recent years, there has been a perceived increase in the numbers of people experiencing homelessness in this country. Accurate counts are impossible, since homeless people find shelter where they can: in abandoned buildings, cars and caves, under bridges, on loading docks, in camps near railroad tracks and rivers, as well as in emergency shelters. Estimates of numbers range from a conservative HUD study of 250,000 (Congressional Quarterly, 1983) to two to three million (Hooper, 1984). The image of older, single men, hoboes or winos, can no longer be maintained as the homeless population. Families, young men and women of all ages are in evidence on the streets and filling emergency shelters across the country. According to a local official, there are an estimated 2500 homeless people in Minneapolis (1984). According to a Metropolitan Council report, almost 35,000 people in the Twin Cities area are without regular housing in the course of a year (Cuthbert, 1986:22).

Principal factors accepted as contributing to homelessness are severe reduction in low-cost housing stock, deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill, unemployment, family violence, and chemical dependency. These categories of persons are known, but little is known about how homeless people themselves perceive their situations: what they understand to have contributed to their situations, what life is like for them on the streets, what they believe would be helpful to stabilizing their lives.

Increased visibility and media attention have fostered mobilization on the behalf of homeless people by concerned people in the public and private sectors in communities across the country. But if intervention is to be effective, and be based on taking the client where s/he is, information about how the clients visualize their situation is vital.

Research Questions

The questions addressed in this study, from the respondents' understanding, were:

1. What were the causative factors which contributed to each becoming homeless?
2. What had the experience of being homeless been like and what had it meant for the respondents?
3. What supports would be helpful to stabilize their lives?

Methodology

Homelessness is defined in this study as being without permanent abode. Research was conducted from November 1985 through August 1986 in Minneapolis, MN in drop-in centers serving homeless and other poor people.

Because the purpose of the research was to gain the clients' understanding and perspectives of their situation, to learn the meanings that they attached to their experiences (Blumer, 1969: Taylor and Bogdan, 1984:9), qualitative methods were employed, the purpose of qualitative methodology being to determine "the distinct qualities of a group of people" (Finestone, conversation, 1987).

The theoretical framework of the research was symbolic interaction, in which it is not the events themselves that are considered important, but rather the individual's response to these events that give them meaning.

To assure validation of the data, and to increase richness, triangulation was employed. Several sources of information were tapped. The literature was searched, both current and historical; key informants were questioned; participant observation and in-depth interviews were conducted (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984: 68-70).

Open by 8 a.m. most mornings, the drop-in centers serve day-time meals, provide opportunities for socialization, and in some cases are the site of job-find services, food shelves, weekly nurse services, informal counseling and the limited social and economic services that two County street workers provide to an estimated two to three thousand homeless people in the Minneapolis metropolitan area. They are primary gathering places for homeless people.

In order to learn the environment, and, by becoming part of the environment, gain trust with clients and staff, participant observation was conducted for nine months in two drop-in centers. The two that were selected included a cross-section of homeless people.

Following the period of participant observation, thirty-seven homeless people were interviewed in-depth in the two centers, using an interview guide. Staff recruited respondents in one center; in the other, the researcher made a brief general announcement explaining the research

and its purpose, announcing the five dollars to be paid for the interview, and requesting volunteers. With the respondents' permission, the interviews were taped, with the researcher also taking notes.

No attempt was made to randomize. Representativeness reflecting the known demographics of the homeless population of the area by way of ehtnicity, age and gender make-up was achieved.

Observations

Two primary groups of observation emerged from the data: the first was a "Downward Spiral" of homelessness; the second, a continuum of homelessness out of which emanated a typology. Implications for practice were bred from these observations, in combination with the suggestions made by the respondents as to what would be helpful.

The Downward Spiral

> I just get tired...I see anymore that money ain't everything, but then you need the money to survive. But people that live in these houses and high rises (should) just stop and look at them (us): 'Who's down there? Where'd they come from, and who are they? They should realize, because they're gonna turn out to be one of us one of these days. (#19:22)

Being homeless is a draining, demoralizing, defeating experience. People who become homeless do not envision themselves as joining in a group event. Becoming homeless is generally an individual, highly personal event. And indeed, of the persons who have become homeless in the past decade, there is little homogeneity. Professional and popular literature from across the country indicates that contributing factors and life experiences are almost as varied as the numbers of homeless individuals (Budd, 1986; Connell, 1987; HuDAC, 1987; Metro Council, 1986: O'Donoghue, 1987; Ropers, 1985; and others).

If the reader will try to imagine her/himself suddenly without a place to stay, perhaps having run through the hospitality of family and friends to "stay a few days or weeks", or having arrived in a new town, searching for work, searching for a place to stay, s/he can follow with the researcher the day-in and day-out process that a homeless person experiences.

First, shelter and food, basic needs, must be located. Probably financial assistance and/or job information is sought. Emergency shelter is often not guaranteed for more than one night. Breakfast generally is not served at the shelter, and often bathing facilities are not available there. Thus the day begins, first, having to be out of the shelter by 7 a.m., locating a place for food, to clean-up, perhaps visiting the welfare office for emergency assistance, or lining up for temporary work. Securing a day's work means arriving at a temporary agency by 5:30 or 6 a.m., and waiting, hoping to be called for a day's work at minimum wage. Breakfast is missed. If lucky, and a job is secured for the day, there is then no opportunity that day to look for a longer-term job. If no job is found for that morning,

the person may line up again at noon for an evening job, meaning that s/he may miss lunch should the drop-in center begin serving later than the usual 11:30. If s/he secures a job, there will be no dinner. S/he will need to locate shelter for the night, getting in line sometimes as early as 3 p.m. and heading to one of the evening feeding programs by 4:30 or 5. It is an existence leading nowhere.

A trip to the Welfare Office usually involves a long wait. The application form is difficult for a well-educated, college professor, let alone a person of limited education with a stress-filled life. If a person qualifies for General Assistance, either deemed incapable of working, or if capable, assigned to Work Readiness for two months, s/he will receive a grant of $203 a month. In a community where a minimal efficiency apartment starts at $250, renting an apartment and purchasing the necessities of life, even in combination with $50 in food stamps, is not likely; it is not enough to stabilize one's life.

The "able-bodied" must attend Work Readiness classes regularly, or lose their grant, even though only information on how to fill out job applications and develop a resume is offered. Job-search help is not provided. If money is earned, the grant is reduced accordingly.

Frustration, lack of finding a job, lack of stable housing, the sense of isolation from and abandonment by the larger society, the gradual loss, having stolen, or giving up what possessions one has out of weariness of carrying them around (belongings may not be left at the shelters); lack of cleanliness, which mitigates against finding a job; all wear on people. And there is the boredom of the sameness, the growing despair, day in and day out. It is a process which depletes hope. Some workers estimate that a person is lost to the streets if homeless more than six months. Some say two months is the limit (Sheehan, 1987). Self-esteem deteriorates, as does one's physical condition. It is a process of survival, of finding food and shelter, and if lucky, security for a night. Relationship needs are minimized; hope wains. As expressed by two of the respondents,

> ...it's just a day by day subsistance, really, with no job or no solid foundation. You can't really make any plans...You just say, 'Well, the sun is down today...and if things didn't work out today, there's always tomorrow.' You take it day by day. (#15, 3)

> It's hard; it's boring. You're not really sure what you're gonna do next, where you're gonna be, you know, if you're gonna make it from one day to the next, really. It's really an unsure world out there on the streets, 'cause you don't know what's gonna happen. (#12, 20)

It is a downward spiral that may be interrupted by the siren song of the streets, from others who have been 'out there' for a long time, 'We're o.k. You're o.k. Stay down here with us. It's the rest of them that's off. You can't get out anyway, so come and party with us.

Have a painkiller--a drink, a joint. You'll feel better.' It is a strangely seductive message that is reinforced by the seeming benign neglect of the public sector, in its minimal outreach and lack of aggressive intervention to provide viable alternatives to survivalism or to address the underlying causatives.

An alternative to the seemingly inevitable submission to the streets is madness. Constant battling to make it off the streets without success apprears to provoke a situational mental illness that acts as a defense (especially among women), and that appears to be a response to the daily struggle to survive. The rule-of-thumb perceived across the country of 30% mentally ill on the streets include these situationally mentally ill, as well as the victims of inadequate, community-based mental health services (Bassuk, 1986; Homelessness, 1986: 6; Stoner, 1984: 4).

By whatever route, the spiral is downward to isolation, to withdrawal or aggression. It is a day-to-day existence which counts on nothing beyond today, which begins to hope for nothing more than to have a place to sleep tonight. It is disheartening, if not impossible, to plan under such circumstances of survival.

Three groups emerged, designated "Resistors", "Teeterers" and "Accomodators".

The Resistors were the largest group. They were determined to get off the streets and found little or no advantage to being without a home.

Second, were the Teeterers, so named because it appeared that a good push in either direction, or perhaps, lack of encouragement, might tip them to one side or another. ("Ambivalence", as a nomenclature, was avoided as this connotes a more conscious, active role than seemed appropriate to the circumstances of most of the members of this group.) Among these were mentally ill people; others who wanted to get off the street, but who had significant barriers, such as illiteracy or chemical dependency; those who were ambivalent about getting off the streets; those who seemed to have lost hope, but had not accomodated to being homeless.

Last are the Accomodators, those who expressed enjoyment of the life of "the road", who had accomodated to being without a home, who had 'given up' trying to rejoin the larger society.

The features which appeared to be important variables, (see Table 1) were:

- length of time homeless
- attitude to being homeless
- location where currently staying
- reasons for homelessness
- literacy
- desire for more education or training
- family dysfunction
- desire for own place
- realistic hopes for the future

Table 1
CONTINUUM OF HOMELESSNESS

Characteristics	RESISTORS	TEETERERS	ACCOMODATORS
Av. length of time homeless	2.2 yrs	4.1 yrs	12.7 yrs
Attitude to being homeless	fighting to get off	ambivalent	accepting
% neg. attitude toward	74	55	0
Staying where?	inside	maj. outside	most outside
Reasons for Hmslns	maj.not of own making	lrgst.grp.not of own making	Half: own decision
Desire for more ed.	79%	45%	33%
Do not want more	16%	18%	50%
Literate	95%	82%	50%
Fam. Dysfunction	42%	82%	67%
Childhood expr. neg.	29%	45%	83%
Desire for own place	84%	30%	17%
Realistic hopes for future	68%	27%	0

Following is a brief discussion of each of the groups on the Continuum.

The "Resistors" included ninteen people. They were determined to get off the street. They, like all the groups, evidenced a strong work ethic, suggesting a direct link between the value system of the larger society and that of people who are homeless. Resistors had, as a group, been homeless for less time than other groups (average 2.2 years). The reader would likely agree that two years is a long time to be without a regular place to stay; most had been on the streets one year or less, three-quarters having been homeless for less than six months. According to their own interpretations, Resistors, for the most part, had no control over becoming homeless. An apartment had burned or was condemned; a job reassignment never materialized, a job was lost through the "adjustments" of a highly competitive market. Other reasons attributed to their homelessness were substance abuse, leaving a job in order to develop a business, and riding the rails to satisfy his girlfriend (even though he wanted off).

An average age of 37.5, the Resistors were older than the other groups, affirming the perceptions of a key informant:

> When the older ones hit the streets, they're more determined to get off. They have more 'history', a strong work ethic. And they are better able to care for themselves, and know where to go (for help). They'll fight more for their independence. They also get put down more and they have more physical problems (Erpelding, 1987).

That twelve of the Resistors were staying inside, with friends, relatives or in shelters, while another three slept in their cars or a rented garage, suggests that a support system continued for some and that some sense of having control over their lives continued. It is not surprising then, that Resistors found little positive about being homeless. Their comments were almost universally negative, most saying that there were no advantages on the street. With few exceptions, even those who found positives, tempered their remarks to include negative aspects:

> You don't have to pay no rent. Everything you do is just what you have to do; you don't have a boss...(But) it gets really cold. You may not have a sleeping bag; all you have is a coat. You run out of shoes from walking so much. Your clothes get all sweaty and dirty from jumping in and out of dumpsters. (#22:32)

Several among other groups professed to enjoy the freedom of being without a home, of being on the road. The researcher pursued this sense of freedom with subsequent respondents. Most of the Resistors did not agree that homelessness meant "freedom".

> Freedom?...the freedom is (when) you have your own place to stay, you have food, you do your own laundry and keep your own clothes. And you don't have to go to these food lines to get your food. You don't have to hope they'll have clothes to fit you or hope that you'll run into a dumpster that has food. (#22, 20)

Congruent with their general respect for education and their determination for a better life, the Resistors had a high rate of literacy. Most had completed high school, some had gone on to college, one having earned two degrees. Although education was important to this group (fifteen wanted more education), the full spectrum of school experiences was represented, from "fun" (#12:30), to "barely made it by the skin of my teeth" (#20, 4), to "the head of (my) class" (#9, 21). Another disliked school so much that she dropped out in ninth grade refusing to go to school even when in reform school; but she was applying to a vocational school at the time of the interview.

Resistors had a lower rate of active substance abuse (5%) than any of the other groups and included an unusually high rate of persons in recovery (47%), suggesting people in transition who have taken positive action on their own behalf. An interruption of the downward cycle is suggested, or the existence of a factor that could either inhibit a further slide or, should an individual regress, accelerate it.

Although more than half had some health problems, all but one were under the care of physicians. Five had conditions that would interfere with job function, but none suggested the disability was a bar to employment.

Only one-fourth of the Resistors were receiving General Assistance (GA); another two had applied for it; four had been cut off, one attributing his homelessness to this. Several of this group spoke against the abuses of welfare that they believed existed, admonishing that native Minnesotans should be helped first, and being concerned that rather than people getting the help that they really needed, they were enabled to remain homeless.

It seems logical that childhood remembrances and family dysfunction would be related. This was not so with the Resistors. More that half reflected positive childhood experiences, yet 43% reflected severe family dysfunction.

Even though most of the Resistors expressed realistic plans or hopes for the future, only five were acting on those hopes or plans. Some of the Resistors hedged with 'one day at a time' responses. Perhaps they were afraid to look at the future as a defense against disappointment. But that they retained hope may be a reflection of the relative brevity of most of this group's homelessness. The slide downward to hopelessness had not accelerated.

"Hope" and "determination" are the key words for the Resistors. Perhaps job experiences, skills, and the life experiences of having known "something better" supported and reinforced their determination. For the researcher, a key question was how long they could cling to hope without anything changing for them, without anything more than their past history reinforcing it. The researcher was astounded that any of those who had been homeless for five years, or sometimes more, were able to continue to struggle and hope.

The Teeterers, numbering eleven, transmitted a sense of helplessness, depression, and vulnerability. Although they communicated feeling no control over their lives, they still clung to a hope for change. The researcher believes that active support, or additional problems in their lives, would make a difference with this group.

Although the youngest group (average age of 32.1 years), the average length of time homeless was four years. Four had been homeless less than a year; four had been on the streets between six and ten years. This group seemed younger to the researcher; perhaps less mature, more naive. Most expressed severe family dysfunction.

> He's (father) passed away now, left an inheritance between me and my sister. I told them to let her have it because I don't want anything to do with my dad. He was always a drunk and abused me when I was a kid. And my mom took a liking to my sister, a lot (#36,12).

Although only three of this group were native to Minnesota, four others were from the region, two of whom had family in the area. Those from out of the area had come to Minnesota for diverse reasons; to find work; to check out the area, having heard it was nice; their children were here; to get GA. They were not, as some of the Resistors believed, transients just passing through to pick up a check (8,11).

Five of the eleven Teeterers were mentally ill, three of them under the care of professionals. Eight complained of physical health problems, a rate higher than either of the other two groups. Not surprising from a wholistic perspective, four out of the five mentally ill people had physical problems as well.

The rate of chemical dependency was the highest of the three groups, a sizeable barrier to getting off the streets. Only one was recovering. Since chemical abuse is often a part of the downward spiral, their use may indicate that these six had accelerated in that course.

Reasons identified by the Teeterers as causatives for their homelessness were diverse. The largest subgroup indicated reasons beyond their control, e.g. release from a psychiatric ward to the streets, physical injuries, lack of job opportunities in the home community still suffering from recession. Several indicated that relationship problems contributed. Only one had chosen "to travel around".

The Teeterers' relatively high literacy rate at 82% was congruent with most having graduated from high school and wanting more education. But just over half had rational hopes for the future.

Most were staying outside, in camps or under bridges, but also viewed street life negatively. Although half did not care about having their own place at the time of the interview, all wanted a place "sometime"...

> When you wake up and you don't know where your next meal is coming from, where your food is comin' from, roof over your head and the clothes on your back. When you've experienced it day after day, month after month, year after year, then come back and tell me what a hard life is about (#14, 33).

Seven of these eleven received GA. One was on Supplementary Security Income (SSI); another applied for but was denied SSI. The GA grant is not considered enough to provide decent housing--"Try to find an apartment, even an effieiency and try to make it on $203 a month!" (#14,17)--but for many, it was the only security in their lives.

> The only reason I do not work here is welfare finds out about it at these job labor places and they'll cut you off... and there is times that I will work day labor, but here I can't because welfare will find out about it. And I depend on that check, so I sort of don't do anything to jeopardize that check. (#18,14)

The Teeterers did not appear to be concerned about abuses of GA; none mentioned them. Whether each was so concerned with personal survival, or was not aware of abuses, or didn't care, was hard to determine.

The Teeterers can best be described as discouraged. They wanted to get off the streets; they had a work focus. It is hard to know whether the mental illness of five of them is a response to being homeless, or exacerbated and exaggerated by it. Their understandable discouragement was feeding into the downward spiral. Without assistance and support it seemed unlikely that any of them would avoid the continued plunge to accomodation to the streets.

The Accomodators, all six male, had acquiesced to living in the streets, or "on the road". They had an external toughness that was almost directly opposite the vulnerability of the Teeterers. This group expressed pride in their ability to survive 'out there', in traveling around, seeing beautiful scenery, having no responsibilities. They had "given up" expecting to be a part of the mainstream, expecting that there was a place for them in the larger society. They had given up hope.

The average age of the Accomodators was 36.3 years. Two left home at age 12; another was 38 when he became homeless. They had been homeless for an average of 12.7 years, the oldest having been on the road for 34 years. These were the hoboes and tramps. Half of these men had "chosen" the life of the road. The American Heritage Dictionary defines "choice" as "option; a sufficient number or variety from which to choose; an alternative" (1969). "Choice" may be an inappropriate word, therefore, given that one'e entire adult life has been that of steelworker, and the steelmills have closed; given childhood experiences of extreme poverty or abuse.

> "A lot of them come from family crisis that are on the streets... Bunches of them are from the prisons...and when they got out they had nothin' to go back to. They couldn't get work or nothin', and that was it...a lot of 'em are out here because they can't get a job. They ain't got the education; nobody wants them. And that's basically it." (#19,27

Education held limited meaning for this group. Half did not graduate from high school; half were illiterate; only two wanted more education or training.

Half of the Accomodators were active substance abusers; none was recovering, but half did not use. The stereotype of the drunken street bum is confounded by these data. Half indicated some health problems, but only one seemed to have mental health issues.

Five of the six were staying outside. It is not surprising that none of the Accomodators wanted their own place. It was important for others, they said, especially people with families, but not for them. Comments about being homeless were generally positive.

> The advantages are everything I've been doing for the past 12 years. The experience, it's always new. You can't get stagnant...but the disadvantage? You're not able to follow up on real, solid friendships. (#30,20)

So despite the adventure and the freedom, the need for relationships was

going unmet. But at least one man wanted it that way: "...when people on the street start gettin' close to me, I move on. I won't let people get close to me." (#23,6) Some expressed that the streets themselves are "home". For some, a sense of "home" existed without four walls and a roof, but was location related.

> ...a tramp winds up going to one specific spot all the time ... If people don't have an actual home, they have someplace they can call home. Everybody needs it...(#30,22)

Half of the Accomodators were receiving welfare. Their attitudes toward welfare abuse was the same as the other two groups, surely reflecting those of the larger society.

Feelings are repressed, born out by the ready anger observed in the drop-ins toward the end of the month, and in the loneliness and isolation that all groups mentioned.

> (You're) looking at a guy here who does have feelings, but after this interview, they won't be showing, and there will be no sign of any feelings ever being mentioned after I walk away. I'll be back to my old asshole self: joking, railroad tramp. (#30,26)

The Accomodators, however, did not express the volume nor depth of boredom of the other two groups. Perhaps they have suppressed their depression, accomodated to the negative and learned to emphasize the positive.

Most of this group had extremely unhappy childhoods. The one who spoke positively of his parents came from such poverty that he thought it would help the rest of the family if he left.

Perhaps these attitudes of Accomodators, expressed as not wanting a home and responsibilities, really reflect a lack of sense of control over their lives, lack of options available to them.

Although work was less of a focus for the Accomodators, they did express a willingness to work hard, but a dislike of authority and structure. There was pride in a full job history, in variety of jobs held and in a sense of mastery of skills. But the desire to move at will was stronger.

The Accomodators had surrendered to a life of homelessness, having reconciled themselves to a permanent life outside the mainstream of society. All were transient for at least part of the year. Perhaps the 22 year old best expressed the loss of hope represented in this life-style, and the repressed feelings of the group:

> That's mainly all it is. It became a way of life for me, something I really enjoyed, the only thing I could really relate to, 'cause I ain't never been anywhere except on the road. Now I'm just starting to fit in with a bunch of tramps. It don't matter no more...(voice cracking) anything, you know. (#30,28)

From the Respondents: What is needed

Three themes emerged from discussion with the respondents about what would be of help to getting off the streets: (1) the federal government should take care of its own before sending money overseas, or spending money on the military, and it should be spent responsibly at home: (2) people should have the opportunity to work and earn money to provide a home for themselves and for their other basic needs; (3) low-cost housing is needed. "The Government ought to do more for people, rather than just blowin' it up in the sky...or sendin' it to San Salvador (sic)" (FN#35,2), was commonly verbalized.

Churches were credited for doing all that they could to help homeless people. Food, served through the drop-ins and soup kitchens, is considered adequate in the Twin Cities. Clothes are known to be available in several locations.

The respondents expressed a need for all forms of housing: emergency shelters with bathing facilities; shelters and group homes aimed at specific populations, e.g. women, the elderly, mentally ill; long-term, affordable, well-maintained housing.

There was a general agreement that the $203 GA grant was inadequate, but most believed that "workfare" in some form should be instituted. Job creation, too, was a strong theme, as was job-find assistance. The respondents believed that MEED, the Minnesota Emergency Employment Act, and CETA should be reinstated. Free bus cards for job hunting were also suggested, as was raising the minimum wage.

Also mentioned were specific services, e.g. counseling, increased referral, reduced red tape, more liberal commitment laws, and improved attitudes on the part of service workers. Behavior and attitude change toward homeless people on the part of the larger society was also recommended.

> Giving them more respect. In front of the news media, the governors and legislators put on a pretty good smile for the people they work for. But in the middle of the night, when a poor person goes up to a free shelter, they're treated like dirt...And the respect they supposedly get as poverty stricken people, they deserve, because they're people who ran into a bit of bad luck. (#34,15)

None of the recommendations was surprising to the researcher, nor unattainable. Some of the recommendations would cost nothing, e.g. positive, respectful treatment by workers.

Implications for Social Work Practice

Emergency services, initiated in the early '80's with the assumption that the increase in homelessness was temporary, have become institutionalized bandaids. Emergency shelters, for some, have become long-term shelters. Services are not being provided in adequate amounts to stabilize the lives of homeless people.

Two areas emerge from the research as challenges for social work practice: advocacy/social policy change and service deliver/coordination.

The research suggests that the longer people are homeless, the more likely they are to stay on the streets, to be lost to the larger society. Early intervention, while hope remains, before the downward spiral has taken hold, is essential. A "triage" approach is suggested, assisting those who have been homeless for the least amount of time first, with the assumption that they will respond more readily to "treatment".

This is not to suggest that only the Resistors be served, but rather that efforts be addressed first to them. It is critical that services be focused specifically. The Teeterers are so named because they could go either way, thus outreach services especially focused on mental health should be addressed to this group.

And for the Accomodators, assuring accessibility to services may be all that can be done, but it must be done.

Advocacy is needed to expand services. One street social worker for two to three thousand clients is not enough. The counseling, the referral, the support, the respect that the respondents wanted and need, if return to the mainstream is to be a possibility, requires adequate staffing. Social workers have a responsibility to understand the realities of life on the streets, and communicate those realities to policy-makers. The historic role of social workers of fighting for the needs of the 'least of these' is as necessary now as at the turn of the century. Advocacy for early intervention and adequate staffing is essential...And then we can volunteer for this distinctly 'front line' duty.

But staffing and referral alone are not adequate. There must be ongoing coordination, in some cases, hand-carrying, if lives are to be stabilized quickly. New Minnesota law mandates case management for the mentally ill. It is needed for all clients. The adequacy of the new law's implementation and staffing is dependent on the determination of policy-makers. Again, organization and advocacy are needed to assure implementation.

Adequate community-based services are desperately needed for the mentally ill. Currently, in every city, mentally ill people roam the streets, avoiding help, denying their illness, their civil rights for self-determination assured, but their need for help unanswered because many do not have the capacity to make reasoned decisions for themselves as to whether to seek or not to seek care. Minnesota has passed a community mental health act that promises to develop a more adequate community mental health system. Social workers have responsibility to assure that the law is implemented; but beyond that, to assure that the commitment law is redesigned to promote mentally ill people getting the help that they need, if not want.

Early intervention and services will be of no benefit without adequate, affordable housing. Some efforts have been made to provide longer-term support services through transitional housing. Scattered site housing

is provided for up to a year with plans and contract for job training and/or work-search developed with the client. Support is provided until the person is stabilized. The despair and sense of hopelessness that accompanies homelessness is recognized in this approach by providing on-going support and services. It has been effective, but the amount of such service is limited, as is low-cost housing in the area.

The Minneapolis-St. Paul Housing Fund has been established by the McKnight Foundation to build affordable housing for families. It is moving slowly. (More Than Shelter Reports, 1986)

Like most major cities, Minneapolis and St. Paul have torn down or gentrified single-room occupancy hotels (SRO's) and low cost apartments without replacing the lost units (Technical Assistance Committee, Minneapolis City Council: 1985). Meanwhile, the reduction in HUD funds by the Reagan Administration has meant that no low income housing has been built with federal funds in Minneapolis in the past seven years.

Although the Twin Cities metro area is reputed to have a low unemployment rate, in reality, the market is flooded by refugees from the closed iron mines of northern Minnesota, people from troubled farm areas, and persons laid off in the flagging computer industry.

Yet there is work to be done in the state. Minnesota, like the rest of the country, is suffering from a deteriorating infrastructure, and reduced staffing in state parks. Jobs could be created, if jobs were a state and federal priority. Social workers must advocate for both housing and jobs.

But more, community organization, just beginning, is needed to organize the homeless on their own behalf. The concept of empowerment is well-known in social work. Good organization can raise the self-esteem of participants while focusing on other positive changes on their behalf. Such organizations might coalesce with peace and justice groups for a yet more powerful voice seeking jobs and affordable housing. The homeless must become a 'force to be reckoned with' on their own behalf.

In summary, a continuum of homelessness emerged from this research. Three groups were identified: the Resistors, the Teeterers, the Accomodators with attendant specific characteristics. A Downward Spiral of Homelessness was noted as the homeless person sinks into despair at the day-in and day-out struggle to survive, and his/her inability to change the situation. Social work intervention is needed on two fronts: on the direct service level, quickly to help the individual into a stable situation, and to advocate for and to organize homeless people to advocate for themselves to create jobs with livable pay, to develop affordable housing and necessary services to support their entry, or re-entry into the mainstream.

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